

Third Edition

AERODYNAMICS OF WIND TURBINES



MARTIN O. L. HANSEN

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Aerodynamics of Wind Turbines

Aerodynamics of Wind Turbines is the established essential text for the fundamental solutions to efficient wind turbine design. Now in its third edition, it has been substantially updated with respect to structural dynamics and control. The new control chapter includes details on how to design a classical pitch and torque regulator to control rotational speed and power, while the section on structural dynamics has been extended with a simplified mechanical system explaining the phenomena of forward and backward whirling modes. Readers will also benefit from a new chapter on vertical-axis wind turbines (VAWTs).

Topics covered include increasing mass flow through the turbine, performance at low and high wind speeds, assessment of the extreme conditions under which the turbine will perform, and the theory for calculating the lifetime of the turbine. The classical blade element momentum method is also covered, as are eigenmodes and the dynamic behaviour of a turbine.

The book describes the effects of the dynamics and how this can be modelled in an aeroelastic code, which is widely used in the design and verification of modern wind turbines. Furthermore, it examines how to calculate the vibration of the whole construction, as well as the time varying loads and global case studies.

Martin O. L. Hansen is a lecturer at the Technical University of Denmark, where he teaches wind turbine and related technologies.

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Martin O. L. Hansen

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Contents

<i>Figures</i>	vii
<i>Tables</i>	xii
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1 General introduction to wind turbines	1
2 Two-dimensional aerodynamics	6
3 Three-dimensional aerodynamics	16
4 One-dimensional momentum theory for an ideal wind turbine	23
5 Shrouded rotors	34
6 The classical blade element momentum method	38
7 Control/regulation and safety systems	54
8 Optimization	72
9 Unsteady BEM model	76
10 Introduction to loads and structures	91
11 Beam theory for wind turbine blades	95
12 Dynamic structural model of wind turbines	110
13 Sources for loads on a wind turbine	130

vi Contents

14	Wind simulation	137
15	Fatigue	145
16	Vertical-axis wind turbines	150
17	Final remarks	163
	<i>Appendix A: basic fluid mechanics equations</i>	166
	<i>Appendix B: symbols</i>	169
	<i>Index</i>	172

Figures

1.1	Horizontal-axis wind turbine, HAWT	4
1.2	The nacelle of a modern Siemens wind turbine	5
2.1	Schematic view of streamlines past an airfoil	6
2.2	Definition of lift and drag	7
2.3	Explanation of the generation of lift	8
2.4	Polar for the FX67-K-170 airfoil	9
2.5	Different stall behaviours	10
2.6	Computed streamlines for an angle of attack of 5° and 15°	11
2.7	Viscous boundary layer at the wall of an airfoil	11
2.8	Schematic view of the shape of the boundary layer for a favourable and an adverse pressure gradient	13
2.9	Schematic view of the transitional process	13
3.1	Streamlines flowing over and under a wing	16
3.2	Velocity vectors seen from behind a wing	17
3.3	A simplified model of the vortex system on a wing	17
3.4	More realistic vortex system on a wing	18
3.5	Induced velocity from a vortex line of strength Γ	18
3.6	The effective angle of attack for a section in a wing and the resulting force $\mathbf{R}$, the lift $\mathbf{L}$ and the induced drag $\mathbf{D}_i$	19
3.7	Computed limiting streamlines on a stall regulated wind turbine blade at a moderately high wind speed	20
3.8	Rotor of a three-bladed wind turbine with rotor radius R	21
3.9	Radial cut in a wind turbine rotor showing airfoils at r/R	21
3.10	Schematic drawing of the vortex system behind a wind turbine	22
4.1	Streamlines past the rotor and the axial velocity and pressure up- and downstream of the rotor	24
4.2	Circular control volume around a wind turbine	25
4.3	Alternative control volume around a wind turbine	26
4.4	The power and thrust coefficients C_p and C_T as a function of the axial induction factor a for an ideal horizontal-axis wind turbine	27
4.5	The measured thrust coefficient C_T as a function of the axial induction factor a and the corresponding rotor states	28

viii *List of figures*

4.6	The expansion of the wake and the velocity jump in the wake for the 1-D model of an ideal wind turbine	28
4.7	Schematic view of the turbulent-wake state induced by the unstable shear flow at the edge of the wake	29
4.8	The velocity triangle for a section of the rotor	30
4.9	Velocity triangle showing the induced velocities for a section of the blade	31
4.10	The efficiency of an optimum turbine with rotation	33
5.1	Ideal flow through a wind turbine in a diffuser	34
5.2	Computed mass flow ratio $\dot{m}_d / \dot{m}_b$ plotted against the computed ratio $C_{p,d} / C_{p,b}$	36
5.3	Computed power coefficient for a rotor in a diffuser as a function of the thrust coefficient C_T	36
6.1	Control volume shaped as an annular element to be used in the BEM model	38
6.2	Velocities at the rotorplane	40
6.3	The local loads on a blade	41
6.4	A linear variation of the load is assumed between two different radial positions r_i and r_{i+1}	43
6.5	Different expressions for the thrust coefficient C_T versus the axial induction factor a	46
6.6	Probability $f(V_i < V_o < V_{i+1})$ that the wind speed lies between V_i and V_{i+1}	48
6.7	Comparison between computed and measured power curve	50
6.8	Power coefficient C_p as a function of the tip speed ratio $\lambda = \omega R / V_o$	50
6.9	Power coefficient C_p as a function of the inverse tip speed ratio $\lambda^{-1} = V_o / \omega R$	51
6.10	Power curve for a pitch controlled wind turbine	52
7.1	A typical torque characteristic for an asynchronous generator	56
7.2	Turnable tip used as an aerodynamic brake and activated by the centrifugal force	56
7.3	Starting a stall-regulated wind turbine at high wind speed	57
7.4	Sketch of mechanism to change the pitch of the blades through a piston placed inside the main shaft	58
7.5	Starting a pitch-regulated wind turbine at high wind speed	59
7.6	Function diagram for a pitch-regulated wind turbine controlling the power	60
7.7	Torque characteristic for an asynchronous generator with variable slip	60
7.8	Optimum pitch angle for different wind speeds	61
7.9	Variation of the mechanical power with the pitch	62
7.10	Computed power curve for the NTK 500/41 wind turbine	62
7.11	Optimum values for the pitch and the necessary pitch to avoid exceeding the nominal power	63
7.12	Constant speed versus variable speed	65

7.13	A generic torque characteristic for a variable-speed pitch-regulated wind turbine	66
7.14	Schematic drawing of a function diagram for a pitch-regulated variable-speed machine	66
7.15	Computed time series of the low speed shaft angular velocity	68
7.16	Computed time series of the produced power	69
7.17	Simulated time history of turbulent wind speed	69
7.18	Computed rotor speed using the VSPR controller	70
7.19	Computed pitch angle using the VSPR controller	70
7.20	Computed power using the VSPR controller	70
8.1	Two different designs	72
8.2	Airfoil data for the NACA63-415 airfoil	73
8.3	Optimum pitch distribution	74
8.4	Optimum chord distribution	75
9.1	Wind turbine described by four coordinate systems	77
9.2	Rotor seen from downstream	78
9.3	A point on the wing described by vectors	79
9.4	Velocity triangle seen locally on a blade	80
9.5	The wake behind a rotor disc seen from above	81
9.6	The local effect on an airfoil	81
9.7	Annular strip	82
9.8	Comparison between measured and computed time series of the rotor-shaft torque	84
9.9	Example of the result using a dynamic stall model	86
9.10	Yawed rotor disc in wind field	86
9.11	Deterministic wind velocity shear	88
9.12	The effect of the tower	89
10.1	Some main loads on a horizontal-axis wind turbine	92
10.2	Example of computed loads using FLEX4	93
11.1	Section of an actual blade	95
11.2	Schematic drawing of a section of a blade	96
11.3	Section of a blade showing the main structural parameters	97
11.4	Section of a blade	97
11.4	Wind turbine blade	100
11.6	Technical beam	100
11.7	Infinitesimal piece of the beam	101
11.8	Orientation of principal axes	101
11.9	Discretized cantilever beam	102
11.10	First flapwise eigenmode (1f)	105
11.11	First edgewise eigenmode (1e)	105
11.12	Second flapwise eigenmode (2f)	106
11.13	Second eigenmode using 50 elements	107
11.14	Total centrifugal force F_x at a spanwise position x	107
11.15	The computed load about the first principal axis	108
11.16	The computed bending moment about the first principal axis	108

x *List of figures*

12.1	SDOF system with no damping	113
12.2	SDOF with lift	114
12.3	Example of a 2-DOF system	115
12.4	Simple 4-DOF mechanical system	121
12.5	The shape of the force for $p_o=1$, $b=18$ and $\theta_o=\pi/2$	122
12.6	Time series of the force experienced by one rod $\omega_o=2.3$ rad/s, $p_o=1$ and $b=18$	123
12.7	The Fourier transform of the time signal of the force experienced by one rod	123
12.8	The forces acting on rod number one	125
12.9	Computed dynamic amplification for the mechanical system shown in Figure 12.4	126
12.10	A schematic drawing of the four modes computed by solving the eigenvalue problem	126
12.11	Shear force at the root of the blades from pure inertia loads and zero acceleration of shaft	129
13.1	The loading caused by the earth's gravitational field	130
13.2	Loading caused by braking the rotor	131
13.3	Effect of coning the rotor	132
13.4	Sketch of turbulent inflow seen by wind turbine rotor.	133
13.5	Rotor plane showing the azimuthal position of a blade and a yawed rotor plane	134
13.6	Simplified structural model	136
14.1	Time history of discrete sampled wind speed at 1 point	137
14.2	Power spectral density function	139
14.3	Computed time series of wind speed in two points	142
14.4	Comparison of actual coherence from the two time series	142
14.5	Point distribution for time histories of wind speed for aeroelastic calculation of wind turbine construction	143
14.6	Comparison between specified PSD and the PSD acting on the rotating blade	144
15.1	Definition of mean stress σ_m and range σ_r for one cycle	146
15.2	An S-N curve	147
15.3	An example of a time history of a flapwise bending moment	148
15.4	Result of using rain-flow counting on the time series from Figure 15.3.	148
15.5	Sequence of cyclic loads with increasing range that gives the same fatigue damage as the original time series	148
16.1	Two different VAWT geometries	151
16.2	The section A-A from Figure 16.1 seen from above for a one- bladed VAWT and the relative velocity of a blade when ignoring the induced wind	151
16.3	The section A-A from Figure 16.1 seen from above for a one- bladed VAWT showing the normal and tangential components of the relative wind ignoring the induced wind speed	151

16.4	The variation of the angle of attack as function of the azimuthal blade position	152
16.5	Azimuthal blade position and global coordinate system for a VAWT	153
16.6	Distribution and size of streamtubes on a VAWT	154
16.7	Another way of setting up the velocity triangle for a blade in a VAWT	155
16.8	Computed power coefficient for gyro-type VAWT	156
16.9	The vortex system behind a 2-D airfoil	159
16.10	The computed vortex system behind a two-bladed VAWT	159
16.11	Comparison between the computed normal and tangential force coefficient using the momentum method ($K=0.3$) and the vortex method for $S=0.1$, $B=2$ and $\lambda=6$, yielding $C_p=0.37$ and $C_T=0.67$	160
16.12	Comparison between the computed normal and tangential force coefficient using the momentum method ($K=0.3$) and the vortex method for $S=0.3$, $B=2$ and $\lambda=6$, yielding $C_p=0.24$ and $C_T=1.15$	161
16.13	Sketch of a CFD grid for a VAWT	161
16.14	Comparison of computed and measured normal and tangential loads	162

Tables

4.1	The numerical relationships between a , a' and x	32
4.2	Glauert's comparison of the computed optimum power coefficient including wake rotation with the Betz limit	32
6.1	Blade description	49
11.1	Main structural parameters for the Tjaereborg blade	99
13.1	Roughness length table	133
13.2	Terrain factor as a function of roughness height	135
16.1	Airfoil data used in the computation of Figure 16.8	157

Preface

This book has been written based on notes from two courses given at the Technical University of Denmark on the mechanical aspects of wind turbines to give a basic understanding of how a wind turbine converts the kinetic energy of the wind into mechanical shaft power, which can be used to drive a generator to finally produce electrical power. This also includes various ways to control the loads and thus the output of the wind turbine by pitching the blades and by controlling the rotational speed. How to actually apply power electronics to vary the torque on the generator shaft to control the rotational rotor speed is not addressed in detail, and an interested reader is referred to textbooks on electrical motors and power electronics. Chapters describing the most important loads on the wind turbine construction are also included. [Chapters 1–8, 10 and 11](#) could form the basis of an undergraduate course in basic wind turbine technology. From these chapters it is possible for a student knowing the geometry of a wind turbine to write a program based on the blade element momentum (BEM) method that can actually estimate the static loads and thus the mechanical power for various wind speeds, pitch angles and rotational speed. Such a program is a valuable tool in an optimization process, where the load distribution must be calculated many times for different design variables in order to maximize some desired property, such as, e.g., the annual energy production.

Building a wind turbine that will not break down during the design lifetime involves calculating time histories of the internal material loads for various unsteady conditions, the most important being a turbulent inflow, which varies in time, as well as space, over the rotor area. This involves building a so-called aeroelastic method that also takes into account the dynamic response of the wind turbine construction from the time varying aerodynamic, gravitational and other loads. The vibration velocities of the blades directly influence the aerodynamic loads, and there is therefore a strong coupling between the aerodynamics and the structural dynamics. Further, local accelerations must be taken into account when calculating the internal material loads. The outline of such a method is given in [Chapters 9 and 12](#), describing respectively an unsteady blade element momentum method and some basic structural dynamics tools. Together with [Chapters 14 and 15](#) these can be used in a graduate course

concerning wind turbine aeroelasticity. [Chapter 14](#) deals with a method to construct a 3D turbulent inflow and [Chapter 15](#) outlines how the fatigue damage is estimated from the various load time histories. These chapters should be supplemented with some norms describing all the different load cases that a wind turbine must be designed for, both with respect to fatigue and ultimate loads. Finally, the vertical-axis concept is addressed in [Chapter 16](#).

1 General introduction to wind turbines

Before addressing more technical aspects of wind turbine technology, an attempt is made to give a short general introduction to wind energy. This involves a very brief historical part explaining the development of wind power, as well as a part dealing with economy and wind turbine design. It is far from intended to give a full historical review of wind turbines, but merely to mention some major milestones in their development and to show examples of historical exploitation of wind power.

Short historical review

The force of the wind can be very strong, as seen after the passage of a hurricane or a typhoon. Historically, people have harnessed this force peacefully, its most important use probably being the propulsion of ships using sails before the invention of the steam engine and the internal combustion engine. Wind has also been used in windmills to grind grain or to pump water for irrigation or, as in Holland, to prevent the ocean from flooding low-lying land. At the beginning of the twentieth century electricity came into use and windmills gradually became wind turbines as the rotor was connected to an electric generator.

The first electrical grids consisted of low-voltage DC cables with high losses. Electricity therefore had to be generated close to the site of use. On farms, small wind turbines were ideal for this purpose and in Denmark Poul la Cour, who was among the first to connect a windmill to a generator, gave a course for 'agricultural' electricians. La Cour had great foresight and in his school he installed one of the first wind tunnels in the world in order to investigate rotor aerodynamics. Gradually, however, diesel engines and steam turbines took over the production of electricity and only during the two world wars, when fuel was scarce, did wind power flourish again.

However, even after the Second World War, the development of more efficient wind turbines was still pursued in several countries such as Germany, the USA, France, the UK and Denmark. In Denmark, this work was undertaken by Johannes Juul, who was an employee in the utility company SEAS and a former student of la Cour. In the mid-1950s Juul introduced what was later called

2 General introduction to wind turbines

the Danish concept by constructing the famous Gedser turbine, which had an upwind three-bladed, stall-regulated rotor, connected to an AC asynchronous generator running with almost constant speed. With the oil crisis in 1973, wind turbines suddenly became interesting again for countries which wanted to be less dependent on oil imports. Therefore many national research programmes were initiated to investigate the possibilities of utilizing wind energy. Large non-commercial prototypes were built to evaluate the economy of wind-produced electricity and to measure the loads on big wind turbines. Since the oil crisis, commercial wind turbines have gradually become an important multibillion dollar industry with annual growth rates of up to 20 per cent.

Why use wind power?

As already mentioned, a country or region where energy production is based on imported coal or oil will become more self-reliant by using alternatives such as wind power. Electricity produced from the wind produces no CO_2 emissions and therefore does not contribute to the greenhouse effect. Wind energy is relatively labour intensive and thus creates many jobs. In remote areas or areas with a weak electricity grid, wind energy can be used for charging batteries or can be combined with a diesel engine to save fuel whenever wind is available. Moreover wind turbines can be used for the desalination of water in coastal areas with little fresh water, for instance the Middle East. At windy sites the cost of electricity, measured in $\$/\text{kWh}$, is competitive with the production cost from more conventional methods, for example, from coal-fired power plants.

To reduce the price further and to make wind energy more competitive with other production methods, wind turbine manufacturers are concentrating on bringing down the price of the turbine itself. Other factors, such as interest rates, cost of land and, not least, the amount of wind available at a certain site, also influence the production cost of the electrical energy generated. The production cost is computed as the investment plus the discounted maintenance cost divided by the discounted production measured in kWh over a period of typically 20 years. When the characteristics of a given turbine is known, i.e. the power for a given wind speed, as well as the annual wind distribution, the annual energy production can be estimated at a specific site.

Some of the drawbacks of wind energy can also be mentioned. Wind turbines create a certain amount of noise when they produce electricity. In modern wind turbines, manufacturers have managed to reduce almost all mechanical noise and are now working hard on reducing aerodynamic noise from the rotating blades. Noise is an important competition factor, especially in densely populated areas. Some people think that wind turbines are unsightly in the landscape, but as bigger and bigger machines gradually replace the older smaller machines, the actual number of wind turbines will be reduced and, at the same time, a greater capacity is available. If many turbines are to be erected in a region, it is important to have public acceptance. This can be achieved by allowing those people living close to the turbines to own a part of the project and thus share

the income. Noise and visual impact will in the future be less important as more wind turbines will be sited offshore.

One problem is that wind energy can only be produced when the wind is blowing. This is not a problem for most countries that are connected to big grids and can therefore buy electricity from the grid in the absence of wind. It is, however, an advantage to know in advance what resources will be available in the near future so that conventional power plants can adapt their production. Reliable weather forecasts are desirable since it takes some time for a coal-fired power plant to change its production. Combining wind energy with hydropower would be a perfect match, since it takes almost no time to open or close a valve at the inlet to a water turbine, i.e. one can save water in the reservoirs when the wind is sufficiently strong.

The wind resource

A wind turbine transforms the kinetic energy in the wind into mechanical energy in a shaft and finally into electrical energy in a generator. The maximum available energy, P_{max} , is thus obtained if theoretically the wind speed could be reduced to zero:

$$P_{max} = \frac{1}{2} \dot{m} V_o^2 = \frac{1}{2} \rho A V_o^3 \quad (1.1)$$

where $\dot{m}$ is the massflow through the rotor, V_o is the wind speed, ρ the density of the air and A the area where the wind speed has been reduced. The equation for the maximum available power is very important since it tells us that the power increases with the cube of the wind speed and only linearly with density and area. The available wind speed at a given site is therefore often first measured over a period of time before a project is initiated.

In practice one cannot reduce the wind speed to zero, so a power coefficient C_p is defined as the ratio between the actual power obtained and the maximum available power as given by Equation 1.1. A theoretical maximum for C_p exists denoted the Betz limit, $C_{p, max} = 16/27 = 0.593$. Modern optimized wind turbines operate close to this limit with C_p up to 0.5. Statistics have been gathered from many turbines sited in Denmark, and as rule of thumb, they produce approximately 1,000 kWh/m²/year. However, the production is very site dependent and the rule of thumb can only be used as a crude estimation and only for a site in Denmark.

Sailors discovered very early that it is more efficient to use the lift force rather than simple drag as the main source of propulsion. Lift and drag are the components of the force perpendicular and parallel to the direction of the relative wind, respectively. It is easy to show theoretically that it is much more efficient to use lift rather than drag when extracting power from the wind. All modern wind turbines therefore consist of a number of rotating blades which look like propeller blades. If the blades are connected to a vertical shaft, the turbine is called a vertical-axis wind turbine, VAWT, and if the shaft is horizontal, the turbine is called a horizontal-axis wind turbine, HAWT. For commercial wind turbines, the majority are HAWTs and the following text therefore mainly focuses on this

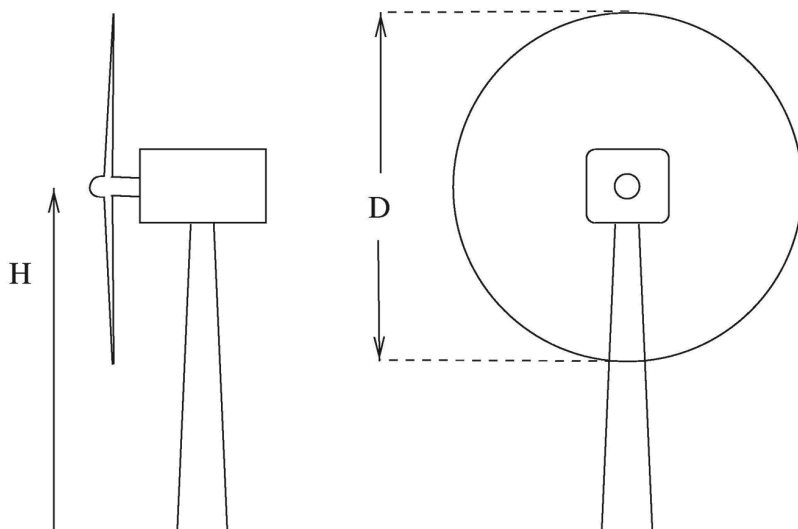


Figure 1.1 Horizontal-axis wind turbine, HAWT

type of machine. A HAWT, as sketched in Figure 1.1, is described in terms of the rotor diameter, the number of blades, the hub height, the rated power and the control strategy.

The hub height is important since the wind speed increases with the height above the ground, and the rotor diameter is important since this gives the area A in the formula for the available power. The ratio between the rotor diameter D and the hub height H is often approximately 1. The rated power is the maximum power allowed for the installed generator, and the control system must ensure that this power is not exceeded in high winds. The number of blades is most commonly two or three. Two-bladed wind turbines are cheaper since they have one blade fewer, but they rotate faster and cause more flickering to the eyes, whereas three-bladed wind turbines seem calmer and therefore less disturbing in a landscape. The aerodynamic efficiency is lower on a two-bladed than on a three-bladed wind turbine. A two-bladed wind turbine is often, but not always, a downwind machine, i.e. the rotor is placed downwind of the tower. Furthermore the connection to the shaft is not rigid, the rotor being mounted on the shaft through a hinge. This is called a teeter mechanism and the effect is that no bending moments are transformed from the rotor to the mechanical shaft. Such a construction is more flexible than the stiff three-bladed rotor, and some components can be built lighter and smaller and thus reduce the price of the wind turbine. The stability of the more flexible rotor must, however, be ensured. Downwind turbines are noisier than upstream turbines, since the passage of each blade in the wake behind the tower at each revolution causes low-frequency noise.

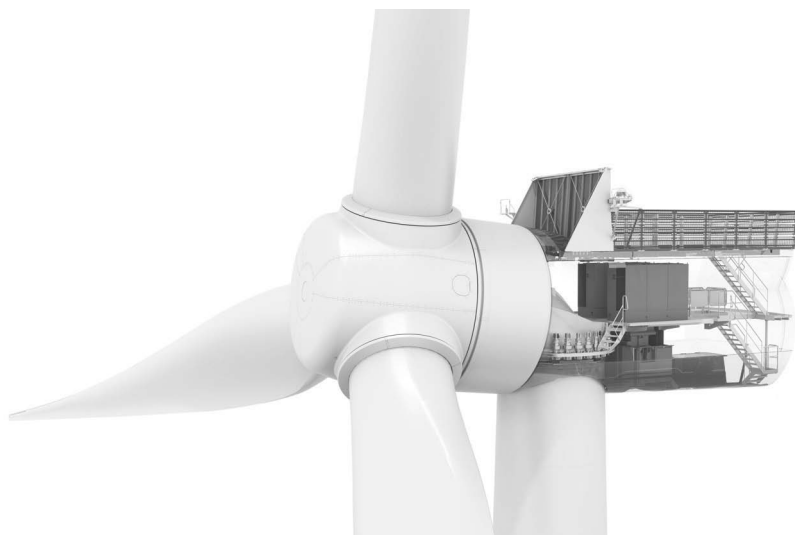


Figure 1.2 The nacelle of a modern Siemens wind turbine (with permission from Siemens Wind Power)

The rotational speed of a wind turbine rotor is approximately 10 to 50 RPM and the rotational speed of most generator shafts is approximately 1,000 to 3,000 RPM. Therefore a gearbox must be placed between the low-speed rotor shaft and the high-speed generator shaft. However, some turbines are equipped with multipole generators, which rotate so slowly that no gearbox is needed, as for example the Siemens wind turbine shown in [Figure 1.2](#), where the blades and a ring of permanent magnets rotates in one large bearing.

Ideally a wind turbine rotor should always be perpendicular to the wind. On most wind turbines a wind vane is therefore mounted somewhere on the turbine to measure the direction of the wind. This signal is coupled with a yaw motor, which continuously turns the nacelle into the wind.

The rotor has undergone great development in recent years. The airfoils used on the first modern wind turbine blades were developed for aircrafts and were not optimized for the much higher angles of attack frequently experienced by a wind turbine blade. Even though old airfoils, as for instance, NACA63-4XX, were often successfully used in many older wind turbines, blade manufacturers have now started to use airfoils specifically optimized for wind turbines. Different materials have been tried in the construction of the blades, which must be sufficiently strong and stiff, have a high fatigue endurance limit and be as cheap as possible. Today most blades are built of glass-fibre-reinforced plastic, but other materials such as laminated wood are also used.

The text in this chapter, including the historical review, the arguments for supporting wind power and the short description of the technology, hopefully will motivate the reader to study the more technical sections concerned with aerodynamics, structures and loads on a wind turbine construction.

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Figure 3.10 Schematic drawing of the vortex system behind a
wind turbine (reproduced

from Wilson and Lissaman (1974) with permission) Increasing
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Figure 4.10 The efficiency of an optimum turbine with rotation. The efficiency is defined

as the ratio between C_p including wake rotation and the Betz limit $C_{p, \text{Betz}} = 16/27 \approx 0.593$.
..... C_p/J 0.4 0.3 0.2 0.1 2 4 6 10 tip speed ratio

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Figure 8.4 Optimum chord distribution for $\lambda=6$, $\alpha_{\text{opt}}=4$, $C_{l,\text{opt}}=0.8$, $C_{d,\text{opt}}=0.012$ and $B=3 \cdot 0.25 \cdot 0.2 \sim \sim$.
 $\sim 0.15 \sim 0: 0.1 \ 0.05 \sim i \cdots : \dots \sim \sim$
 $\sim \backslash i \ 8.1 \ 0.2 \ 0.3 \ 0.4 \ 0.5 \ 0.6 \ 0.7 \ 0.8 \ 0.9 \ r/R$

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Figure 12.11 Shear force at the root of the blades from pure inertia loads and zero

acceleration of shaft Angle Angle Angle Angle Angle
Angle Angle Angle Angle Angle Angle Angle Angle
Angle

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Figure 14.6 Comparison between specified PSD and the PSD
acting on the rotating blade Angle Angle Angle Angle
Angle Angle 1 Angle Angle time series + specified
coherence -----time series + specified coherence
-----time series + specified coherence -----time series
+ specified coherence -----

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C

n Experiment, Oler et al. Non-linear cubic k-e model 1.0 -4.0 5.0 4.0 3.0 2.0 0.0 -1.0 -2.0 -3.0 -5.0 0 60 120 180 240 300 360 Φ

C

t Experiment, Oler et al. Non-linear cubic k-e model

Figure 16.14 Comparison of computed and measured normal and tangential loads

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